REFERENTIAL ART

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By

Mark H. Belisle

University of Minnesota

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INTRODUCTION

In this modest paper I have attempted to allude to the attitudes and references which form a basis for my work. I have refrained not only from discussing specific examples of my work, as seems to be traditional procedure for papers such as this, but have left myself out of the paper almost entirely, even writing it in the third person.

What follows is not a dissertation or a thesis but a series of more or less related allusions, hyperboles, and innuendoes, all centered on the problem of the so-called "identity crisis" in modern art. Beginning with a brief discussion of modern art and modern philosophy, the paper in turn touches upon modern art and subjectivity, art and edification, and art and philosophy. It has not been my intention (much less my hope) to write a thorough and definitive paper on these issues; rather, my goal has been to elaborate a bit on my own prejudices.

REFERENTIAL ART

When art -- i.e. aesthetics and theory -- are discussed at arm's length, as in an art historical research paper, a writer is on fairly solid ground. Then the problem becomes one of adequate research and documentation. When a writer plunges into the subjective waters of opinion and conjecture, however, the risks become a little more incalculable.

Not the least of these risks involves the manner in which the writings are received. Art theory and art criticism, because they are partners -- albeit sparring partners -- with art itself, run the risk of themselves being criticized or rejected. Theory and criticism, while claiming to be less temperamental and maverick than art, nonetheless are themselves of a creative and subjective nature.

When venturing into highly relative areas of study, such as art, one cannot find solace in the absolute and the empirical. Discussing art is somewhat similar to discussing religion; the tendency is toward arguments that are animated but (from the other person's point of view) unconvincing. As author and philosopher William Barrett says, "only a silly man or a pedant ... would think religious belief is a factual hypothesis on which we must have convincing ev-

idence."[1]

A work of art can be discussed in a number of ways. To speak of a body of work as the documentation of anquished artistic growth is somewhat of a throwback to the romanticism of another century, as well as an imposition on the patience and good will of the reader. A discussion of working methods is a possibility only when the production process is of substance and interest. But a work of art can also be discussed in terms of its theoretical implications and associations, or in terms of its lack of same. One could even discuss ideas detached from specific instances, insofar as the ideas and issues exist independently of specific works. And it is felt by some that the manner in which a particular work of art relates to past, present, or future works is of greater consequence than how it looks. One would agree that the value of a particular work does not reside solely in its aesthetic facade.

The notion of what one might call "formalist" art, or "art for art's sake", has been under discussion for quite some time now. "Formalist" art may be

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[1]William Barrett, Time of Need (New York, 1972), p. 306.

viewed as something of a reaction to the art of the past. The art of the past did not glorify form for its own sake, but was intent upon being edifying and didactic. If contemporary art tends to avoid having such lofty aspirations it is because modern man finds modern art too unintelligible and probably would not be swayed by it anyway.

In 1928, when the Surrealist Andre Breton wrote, " ... let us not forget that in this epoch it is reality itself that is in question",[2] he was more or less articulating what had been intimated for a long time. Breton and the Surrealists were carrying on a tradition that had been begun long before, but which more recently had been continued by de Chirico and the Dadaists. (Of course Dada was not involved in the moderate activity of mere questioning.) The Surrealists (and others) made their assault on reality as the Cubists made their assault on form. If the nineteenth century, in terms of art history, can be seen as a reaction against Renaissance aesthetics, then the twentieth century, again in art historical terms, can be seen not only as the logical outcome of the previous century's experimentation but also as a rejection of traditional subject-

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[2]Andre Breton, "Surrealism and Painting", in Theories of Modern Art, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Los Angeles, 1968), p. 405.

matter, and therefore, as a rejection of the Renaissance world view.

In recent years this trend has developed even further. In an article entitled "Anti-art and Criticism", Allen Leepa writes:

> To understand the present it is helpful to know its roots in the past. One of the principal characteristics of various contemporary avant-garde movements is their break with the tradition of Romanticism. The Romantic ideal has been one of the dominating factors in art. At its core is emotional expression and personal interpretation. This is as true of Abstract Expressionism as of Fauvism of Impressionism ... The Romantic movement in art is characterized by a struggle for the hidden within the self, a search for the intangible and mysterious in nature, the unattainable experience ... When Romanticism gradually lost its momentum, the aesthetic pendulum swung to the opposite pole, to Existentialism. Existentialism, one of the most vital philosophies of the twentieth century and particularly of the postwar period, holds that man's position on earth is absurd -- he is unable to understand the reason for his existence. Rather than continue to look to romantic, imaginary, subjective interpretations of the world, the Existentialists prefer to face existence phenomenologically ... Art is caught up in this shift in man's evaluation of himself and his role in the world. Some of the new movements no longer take seriously the idea that art is the embodiment of a subjective, intangible, imaginary world ... The absurdity of man's position in the world has become the guiding idea of many contemporary artists. The most meaningful act that can be performed, they insist, is to emphasize the meaninglessness of life.[3]

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[3]Allen Leepa, "Anti-art and Criticism", in The New Art, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York, 1973), pp. 132 ff.

Existentialism (and Nihilism) in modern art is also the subject of discussion in William Barrett's book Time of Need (subtitled Forms of Imagination in the Twentieth Century). In his book Barrett discusses contemporary philosophy and its expression in modern art and literature. A rather neat summary of art history is provided by his discussion of three sculptural pieces: Head of Agrippa (1st Century A.D.); Head of John the Baptist (from Riems Cathedral, 13th Century); and Giacometti's Head (1928). To Barrett these three heads signify, correspondingly, wordly man, spiritual man, and problematic man. Of the work by Giacometti, Barrett writes:

> This blank face ... makes us think of Sartre's dictum that man has no essence: he exists first and then has to create what he is. Yet, empty as it is, this is not the face of a mindless zombie. Giacometti has put energy, boldness, and power into it. It is the face of a conquistador -- and not the conquerer of this or that historical kingdom, but of nature itself. We know that this creature in our time has mastered the secrets of atomic energy, soared into space, and girdled the earth in his network of communications. Yet if one continues to look at his face, one begins to feel a haunting and poignant quality about it. Despite all that power that he has amassed, this strange creature still finds his existence questionable: he does not know who he is or what his meaning is.[4]

It might be argued that Barrett's analysis of

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[4]Barrett, p. 162.

Giacometti's Head is a very questionable one; that it might not be accurate at all. The objection is appreciated, but specific instances are really beside the point. With very little trouble the explanation might be adjusted to fit any number of other contemporary works. The analysis, however, does illustrate the point that contemporary artists are concerned with something more than formal innovation. They have gone beyond shattering old forms and replacing them with new ones; they have also taken up shattering values and attitudes and substituting new ones in their stead.

In the past, art was usually directed toward something outside itself. In primitive societies it served the tribe in its dealings with ambivalent deities and hostile animals. In medieval Europe it was enlisted into the cause of the Church. In preindustrial Europe it was brought into the courts of the aristocracy or pressed into the service of the state. Art has usually been aligned with the status quo. Consequently, its role as an avant-garde activity is somewhat exaggerated. But generally speaking, art did not associate itself primarily with money or power, but with ideas, attitudes, philosophies, and personalities. In a society in which the artist played a very supportive role, and in which he did

not dare (or even think to dare) to set himself against the Church or the state, the art he produced was nonetheless a good indication of his own feelings and beliefs. The artist, like everyone else at the time, happened to be at one with his age, at least for the most part. In later centuries when he assumed a relative autonomy, his art continued to do what it had done all along. The nature of his art had not changed as much as he had changed.

It was only recently that the image of the artist as a lonely and heroic figure (an image which had its origins in the Renaissance) came into its own. One can see instances in which the artist almost consciously attempts to make himself over into this ideal type; alienated and isolated. Some twentieth-century artists no longer sought to isolate themselves physically; they sought a psychic isolation -- something which was far more effective. The Dadaist asserted himself not by painting odalisques, Tahitian women, or French landscapes, but by exulting the banal, the ugly, and the obscene. He expressed himself not by being eccentric, but by being outrageous.

In 1956 the journalist Selden Rodman interviewed Jackson Pollock:

> I asked Pollock to elaborate on this business of labels. "I don't care for 'abstract expressionism'," he said, "and its certainly not 'nonobjective', and not 'nonrepresentational' either. I'm very representational some of the time, and a little all of the time. But when you're painting out of your unconscious, figures are bound to emerge ..."
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> "When you start a picture," I asked him, "do you have any preconceived visual image in mind, or is the result wholly spontaneous, something that happens in the process of painting?"
>
> When Pollock prepares to answer, he squints, screws up his face, tilts it to one side. "How do I know? I have and I haven't. Something in me knows where I'm going, and -- well, painting is a state of being."
>
> "You mean 'being' and 'becoming' are one?"
>
> "Exactly -- I guess."
>
> "I don't blame you for guessing," I laughed. "I'm not sure what I meant myself."
>
> "No. This is what I'm trying to get at. Painting is self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is."[5]

Pollock is one of the few who could get away with a statement like that.

Mondrian and his collaborators in De Stijl are generally thought of as paragons of objectivity.

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[5]Selden Rodman, Conversations With Artists (New York, 1961), p. 82.

Mondrian's Neoplacticism is considered eloquent abstraction *par excellence*. As Herschel B. Chipp notes, Mondrian's cool abstraction may be misleading:

> Mondrian's high valuation of internal rather than external things, and of abstract rather than natural ones, is related to the principal tenets of Theosophy. It starts with the assumption of the essence of God, and then deduces from it the nature of the universe. Because everything is seen through God, the natural world is essentially spiritual. Evil, which arises from a desire for material or finite things, may be overcome by absorption in God or the infinite.6

Theo van Doesburg, another De Stijl artist, said that "the quadrangle is the token of a new humanity. The square is to us what the cross was to the early Christians."[7]

In their "realistic Manifesto" of 1920, the brothers Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner wrote that:

> Art should attend us everywhere that life flows and acts ... at the beach, at the table, at work, at rest, at play; on working days and holidays ... at home and on the road ... in order that the flame to live should not extinguish in mankind.8

These selections would suggest that few if any of the great "old masters of modern art", including the great abstractionists, were involved in

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[6]Chipp, p. 321.

[7]*Ibid.*, p. 316.

[8]Naum Gabo, "The Realist Manifesto", in Chipp, p. 325.

the pursuit of "art for art's sake". Although each may have worked without a subjectmatter, none worked without content. Kandinsky was acutely aware of the danger that abstract painting, unless subjected to inner necessity or conviction, would degenerate into something resembling necktie design. Probably, most of these artists -- Kandinsky, Mondrian, Gabo, Malevich, Pollock -- sensed the danger and therefore went to great lengths to provide some philosophical justification for their work. The great profusion of manifestoes issued in the early part of this century would suggest that this is so. Sometimes embarassing, sometimes amusing, often rhetorical, these manifestoes tend to discredit the notion that these artists were producing art for its own sake.

Despite the constant and numerous disclaimers, artists today continue this tradition. Although removed even further from associations with Church or state, few if any approach total objectivity in their work. One of the current trends, in fact, involves the rejection of the formalist aesthetic. There are indications that some artists are tiring of "art for art's sake" and are gravitating toward militancy instead of disinterest. Critic Gregory

Battcock, in an article entitled "The Warhol Generation", writes:

> Today, art has got to begin to perform. Art should either be entertaining, outrageous, provacative, or inciteful. There is no point in trying to convince everybody that, somehow, art will help improve their miserable lives, because it won't. Neither art nor god has ever helped improve the quality of life, although you will find people who will swear upon the edifying power of one or the other. The failure of the art educator in recognizing the proper questions in art is only surpassed by the failure of the modern artists who has allowed himself to be collared and leashed and led down the path of philosophy and poetry.9

Battcock's little tirade represents one end of a continuum that stretches back at least as far as the seventeenth century. Nicolas Poussin -- the great classical Baroque artist, perhaps the epitome of the artist as teacher and inspirer -- is a good example of the other end. Poussin's work is a conscious attempt to teach and edify. His purpose is not to soothe, shock, or entertain, but to appeal directly to the mind of the viewer. Poussin's feelings on the role of art as a moral authority are well-known. Like his contemporaries, Poussin believed that only certain themes were appropriate for treatment in a work of art; these themes being,

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9Battcock, p. 28.

of course, episodes from sacred, secular, and mythological history. Furthermore, the chief protagonists represented in the painting had to be admirable human types, and the artist was not allowed to be casual in his selection of models for these human figures. On the contrary, he had to exercise great discrimination in his imitation of nature, selecting as his models only "nature's best parts". Thus for Poussin painting did not involve an appeal to the senses but rather an appeal to the mind. Consequently color, because of its optical properties and sensual nature, was considered secondary to design. Its principal justification lie in its ability to appeal to the eye of the viewer and to function as an enticement until more cerebral forces took over. The purpose of a painting for Poussin, then, was to convey to the audience an idea, a moral, an allegory; it had to communicate, inspire, teach and edify.

It does not seem that artists have ever totally relinquished their spiritual aspirations. The breaking through to the spiritual remains a concern for artists even in the twentieth century; Mondrian's preoccupation with Theosophy and his attempts to incorporate its tenets into his work have been noted

already. Wassily Kandinsky, who preceded him in abstraction by only a few years, wrote in 1912:

> At the appointed time, necessities become ripe. That is, the creative spirit (which one can designate as the abstract spirit) finds an avenue to the soul, later to other souls, and causes a yearning, an inner urge.
>
> When the conditions necessary for the ripening of a precise form are filled, the yearning, the inner urge acquires the power to create in the human spirit a new value which, consciously or unconsciously, begins to live in the human being. From this moment on, consciously or unconsciously, the human being seeks to find a material form for the new value which lives in him in spiritual form.
>
> That is the searching of the spiritual value for materialization. Matter is here a storeroom and from it the spirit chooses what is specifically necessary for it -- just as the cook would.
>
> That is the positive, the creative. That is the good. The white, fertilizing ray.
>
> This white ray leads to evolution, to elevation. Thus behind matter the creative spirit is concealed within matter. The veiling of the spirit in the material is often so dense that there are generally few people who can see through to the spirit.10

Again, and again, such preoccupations with the spiritual, the universal, or the metaphysical surface in works, movements, and manifestoes. The Italian

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10Wassily Kandinsky, "On the Problem of Form", in Chipp, p. 155.

painter Carlo Carra, who switched from Futurism to Pittura Metafisica, discussed in 1919 the spiritual implications of his work. Among other things, he said that "the universe appears to me wholly in terms of symbols, ranged at the same distance, as if I were looking down on a city plan."[11]

On the other hand, Carra's old associates, the Futurists, were not concerned so much with the metaphysical as with the dynamic and modern. In the Futurist Manifesto Marinetti wrote that "there is no more Beauty except in struggle." He continued:

> We will destroy museums, libraries, and fight against moralism, feminism, and all utilitarian cowardice ... We will sing the great masses agitated by work, pleasure or revolt; we will sing the multi-colored and polyphonic surf of revolutions in modern capitals; the nocturnal vibrations of arsenals ... 12

The instances of the intrusion of personal values into modern art are countless. The prevailing notion of art history which interprets the last

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[11]Carlo Carra, "The Quadrant of the Spirit", in Chipp, p. 454.

[12]F.T. Marinetti, "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism", in Chipp, p. 286.

hundred years as the evolution of form is a helpful insight, but a gross oversimplification as well. It is a temptation to reduce the history of art to a stylistic dialectic, but it should be possible to see the history of art as more than just the changing of aesthetic vogue; it is as much a philosophical dialectic as a formal one.

Another danger is to reduce art movements and individual works to their theoretical or philosophical bases. This would clearly constitute a tendency toward the other extreme, of which the following is a fair illustration. In 1949, the following speech was delivered before the House of Representatives:

> What are these isms that are the very foundation of so-called modern art? ... All these isms are of foreign origin, and truly should have no place in American art. While not all are media of social or political protest, all are instruments and weapons of destruction ...
>
> Cubism aims to destroy by designed disorder.
>
> Futurism aims to destroy by the machine myth ...
>
> Dadaism aims to destroy by ridicule.
>
> Expressionism aims to destroy by aping the primitive and insane ...
>
> Abstractionism aims to destroy by the creation of brainstorms.

> Surrealism aims to destroy by the denial of reason ...
>
> The artists of the "isms" change their designations as often and as readily as the Communist front organizations. Picasso, who is a Dadaist, an Abstractionist, or a Surrealist, as unstable fancy dictates, is the hero of all the crackpots in so-called modern art ... 13

The good congressman who made this impassioned speech saw in "so-called" modern art not only a rejection of traditional values and aesthetics, but more importantly, a serious threat to them as well. One tends, however, to doubt the power of art to persuade or subvert. Perhaps one senses that art has a miniscule capacity for influence. One can admire a painting by David, yet does not feel constrained to become a Bonapartist. Perhaps this is why, during the Renaissance, the Church could appreciate and promote the art of the Antiques so freely. It did not seem likely that, under the spell of Greek gods and goddesses, any of the faithful would lapse into paganism. And as someone noted, anyone who could be seduced by a statue would not do very well in the face of life's harsher persuasions.

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[13]Congressman George Dondero, in Chipp, p. 497.

It has been rightly stated that art doesn't prove anything. Battcock's accusation -- that art hasn't improved anything either -- is less supportable. And although the days of didactic art seem to be over, the production of art that edifies seems to still be an aspiration for many artists.

The days of "art for art's sake", if they ever really existed, seem to be over. One of the contemporary trends in art seems to lie not in the abandonment of content but rather in the relinquishing of form. In discussing the new art Jack Burnham writes that "increasingly, pure energy and information seem to be the essences of art. All else is being dropped methodically by the wayside."[14]

It is a curious phenomenon, although perhaps not an altogether surprising one, that information has because such a hot aesthetic commodity. (Perhaps one should classify information as a conceptual commodity rather than as an aesthetic one.) Concerning the information "obsession", which exists in other areas of culture as well as in art, William Barrett writes:

The inertia of negligence almost let our

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[14]Jack Burnham, Beyond Modern Sculpture (new York, 1968).

> environment be destroyed before we took notice. But forewarned is forearmed, and nothing like that (so we assure ourselves) could happen again if we but stay resolutely well-informed. If we use all the resources of historic information, the historic process will not take place behind our backs. 15

Barrett goes on to question this preoccupation (or perhaps complacency) with information. He is not the first to do so. It has always been accepted that something exists outside the body of knowledge called "fact". D. H. Lawrence wrote that:

> There are many ways of knowing, there are many sorts of knowledge. But the true ways of knowing, for man, are knowing in terms of apartness, which is mental, rational, scientific, and knowing in terms of togetherness, which is religious ... 16

Another writer, George Santayana, said that in some ways poetry is truer than science, and that "science ... the deeper it goes gets thinner and thinner and cheats us altogether."[17]

The tensions between art and science, and between art and philosophy are old; they have existed almost from the very beginning. The rivalry between

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[15]Barrett, p. 5.

[16]D. H. Lawrence, Apropos of Lady Chatterley's Lover (London, 1930), p. 55.

[17]George Santayana, Realms of Being (New York, 1940), p. 233.

poetry and philosophy goes back to the time of Plato. In his introduction to a chapter in Plato's Republic entitled "How Representation in Art is Related to Truth", Francis MacDonald Cornford writes that:

> The main object of attack ... is the claim, currently made by sophists and professional reciters of the Homeric poems, that Homer in particular, and in a less degree the tragedians, were masters of all technical knowledge, from wagon-building or chariot-driving to strategy, and also moral and religious guides to the conduct of life. 18

If the issue between philosophy and art was settled back in the fourth century B.C., few seem to be aware of it today. Although people are sophisticated enough to concede that science is empirical, philosophy speculative, and art neither, the artist today seems to enjoy an autonomy, an authority, and an image as prophet, rebel, and hero. Not only does the artist adopt this posture, but society more or less sanctions the role. Irwin Edman, writing in Arts and the Man, seems to support this, saying that "the arts are themselves instances or anagrams of moral philosophy; their images show what minds must prove."[19] Edman also says that "it is precisely because they

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[18]Francis MacDonald Cornford, ed., The Republic of Plato (New York, 1970), p. 322.

[19]Irwin Edman, Arts and the Man (New York, 1928), p. 128.

have imaginative power that the arts have moral dignity and importance."[20]

Beneath the rhetoric and the truisms lies the question as to the role which art plays in revealing truth or beauty to man. Edman says that "an idea may be communicated not simply in a formula but in a myth or a metaphor."[21] This, certainly, is something one can accept. But though, as Plato pointed out, the artist is a born rebel, there is little divine assurance that he is an enlightened one.[22] Art is a human activity that seems unable to firmly establish its nature or its authority. It lacks the empiricism of science, and although at times it assumes the speculative nature of philosophy, it lacks philosophy's consistency and logic. The artists, whether engaged in painting or writing, often sets himself up as philosopher, or critic, or revolutionary.

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[20] Ibid., p. 49.

[21] Ibid., p. 79.

[22] The Church, which formerly exerted stringent control over artistic production, has recently stated: " ... the Church possesses no divine guarantee of infalibility in matters of art." (Documents of Vatican II, p. 176.)

Intrinsically, however, he is authorized to do nothing but practice the technical aspects of his craft.

At the close of his Book Barrett comments: "We seem torn between the Scylla of aesthetic stagnation and the Chrybdis of empty experimentation."[23] Insofar as much of modern art is without conscious message, it is empty experimentation. But in the sense of what Pollock said, that every good artist paints what he is, purely formal (or empty) art is an impossibility. Every art object or every art idea (conceptual art) is imbued with revealing traces of the artist's personality, no matter how microscopic or bland those traces may be. Warhol gives himself away in his Campbell soup cans, Duchamp reveals himself in a urinal, and El Greco tells us about himself in his religious paintings.

Someone once said that art, music, and dance were things that did not save man's soul but which made his soul worth saving. This is the type of statement that is not appreciated much these days; there is some validity to it nonetheless. It is the

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[23]Barrett, p. 380.

type of statement that seems to belong to a less cynical age, an age in which to discuss art was to discuss beauty. Nowadays one does not talk about beauty but about aesthetics or form. Concerning the modern formalist bent Gregory Battcock has written that the artist has been misled "into thinking that his first concern should be with idea, theory, and concept when, in fact, it probably should be about the restructuring of society."[24]

Surprisingly (or perhaps not so surprisingly) this concern with art and the restructuring of society is in vogue again. Harold Rosenberg talks about "The Museum Today" and how the formalist trend is now being superceded by a kind of aesthetic activism. Rosenberg notes that contrary to its traditional role as an institution removed from temporal reality, the museum (in many cases) has decided to get in step with the twentieth century -- but quickly. No longer content to be a mere exhibitor or cataloger, the museum wants to be an actor. Rosenberg writes:

> Since the War, art museums have become increasingly avant-garde; in many respects, they have outstripped art itself in pursuit

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[24]Battcock, p. 25.

> of the new ... Like the political historian, the art historian has been recast into a conscious maker of history, not merely the orderly recorder of accomplishments of former times. 25

Rosenberg goes on to relate the contents of a television interview with the Director of the Museum of Modern Art:

> In reply to a question as to what "people should experience in museums," the spokesman for the Museum of Modern Art declared that "First of all it ought to be fun," and said that he hoped this fun might be "connected with some sort of visual experience which they (the spectators) might not get anywhere else." (Presumably, an undersea expedition would qualify). Having thus characterized the Museum as an agency of mass entertainment and education ...
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> Listening to Hightower, his television interviewer appeared to gain the impression that paintings and sculptures had become superfluous at the Museum of Modern Art. "If you had your way," she asked, "would you move up to the older museums in the country what are now the old masters of modern art?" The Director thought this "a really ticklish question" ... 26

In an age in which the morality and sanity of applying paint to canvas has been questioned -- questioned in the light of the political atrocities

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[25]Harold Rosenberg, The De-definition of Art (New York, 1972), p. 235.

[26]Ibid., pp. 237 ff.

which are taking place around the world and around the clock -- the "art for art's sake" aesthetic, after years of pre-eminence, seems to have played itself out. Artists, just as they once recoiled from didactic history-painting, now seem to be reacting to the boredom of naked aesthetics. Rosenberg says that:

> In the face of the mounting pace of social and political upheavals, the program of shunning political fact in art has resulted in increasing frustration. Artists stirred by social indignation have found themselves locked in a medium that has lost its voice. 27

At some point a synthesis should be made. Purely formal art, as well as purely formless art, is difficult to produce. The exaltation of "pure" form does not abolish content; it becomes the content itself. An attempt to convey pure energy, pure information, pure meaning, or pure message results not in pure content but in diminished form. One must be resigned to the inherent limitations of visual art. Art is about as perfect as man is. Arp said that art is like a fruit that comes out of man, like the fruit out of the plant, like the child out of the mother. Consequently art never achieves autonomy, never totally lives a life of its own, but always exists in a context; i.e. in the context of the

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[27] Ibid., p. 139.

artist. In this sense art never becomes pure and indivisible but exists in its material state and in its referential state; it exists as a reference to someone or something outside itself. Consequently, one must acknowledge the fact that one's work will always be grounded in material and in implication. The artist must recognize the limitations of his trade; he cannot prove anything by his art, he cannot have it pure, he cannot change the world by it. But since he cannot escape responsibility for both form and content, his dilemma is that he is involved in a field that is less than useful and more than frivolous. Perhaps he will come to see his art as a support for something else, something larger and more universal. In another context Larry Rivers said something that is applicable here:

> I don't have the faith in "self" that abstract painters need. I don't think "self" is that important nor the expression of "self". I want something definite on which to hinge the mystery of art. For the time being, at least, I believe in common references. 28

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[28]Larry Rivers, quoted in Larry Rivers by Sam Hunter (New York), p. 27.

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